

***Vogue* as an Example of Effective Fashion Magazine Covers**

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Abstract

In this study, my objective was to determine what cover design elements contribute to the success of *Vogue*, the world's leading women's fashion magazine. I found that color, fonts, layout, and photography all work together to make a cover that both catches the reader's eye and gives the reader information about the magazine's contents. I was able to narrow this down through extensive research on the background of women's fashion magazines and, specifically, the history and future of *Vogue*.

In order to find out what is different about *Vogue*'s printed magazine covers compared to other fashion magazines and discover how the techniques they use have helped them take the lead in the magazine industry, I surveyed 60 women between the ages of 20 and 40 and asked them a series of basic, demographic questions, followed by a comparison of variations on a traditionally *Vogue*-looking magazine cover.

Through my research I was able to find that women, in general, are drawn to the simple beauty that makes *Vogue* so appealing. The women surveyed appeared to agree that the "best" cover was the original, traditionally-*Vogue* cover with simple fonts, color, layout, and photography.

This research will interest designers of magazine covers because it will show them which techniques work and specifically, on what audiences. By figuring out how to catch a readers attention, the magazine industry may be able to maintain their significance and continue to be successful for decades to come.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Purpose of Study

It is interesting that women's fashion magazine covers all look somewhat similar. They use similar iconic fonts, muted colors, beautiful photographs, and a general layout that features a large masthead, image as a focal point, and text surrounding the image. Yet, one magazine stands out from the others; *Vogue*. "*Vogue* magazine is the gold standard of all magazines that target stylish and sophisticated women." ("History of *Vogue*," 2012).

Why is *Vogue* the most recognizable and successful fashion magazine worldwide? What is it about their magazine covers and style that is unique from other fashion magazines? This research explored how and why *Vogue* has managed to make its way to the top of the industry. It will compare the similarities and differences between *Vogue* and other fashion magazines. This research will narrow down what *Vogue* does differently and how this has positively influenced their success in the magazine industry. According to Monk (2009), "*Vogue* is very successful in attracting its audience, resulting in continual high readership." Many women's fashion magazines, such as *Elle*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Marie Claire* market to the same audience as *Vogue*, but have not made the same impression.

Why Does it Matter?

The printed magazine industry is declining, so every penny invested into production must be carefully thought out to maximize profit. In *Vogue*'s September 2013 issue, there were 665 pages of advertisements, yet their sales have dropped 10.4% (Dee, 2013). Printed magazines may be suffering, but these magazines are still being viewed online. As the digital magazine industry grows, it is more important than ever that printed covers are eye-catching. The printed cover of a magazine has an impact on a customer's likelihood to purchase it, so the audience must be kept in mind in the design process. There should be strength in creativity and composition in order to attract the eye and tell a story (Acebedo, 2013). Colors, fonts, cover lines, and magazine identity also play a role in catching the reader's attention and getting someone to purchase the magazine.

Variation

When it comes to sophisticated, high-fashion magazines, such as *Vogue*, simplicity and muted colors are a trend. U.S. *Vogue* uses significantly more white on its covers compared to French or Italian *Vogue*. (Labarre, 2012). Even though the magazines are under the same name, their covers vary drastically. The colors, content, and models may change, but *Vogue* has a consistent look on each of its variations. This consistency has contributed to *Vogue*'s success because it is a recognizable and iconic identity. As Brown (2013) comments, "Remember, when you feel thoroughly annoyed by pushing out the same content, that's the same time you have just made a decent impression in the market."

In the beginning, "The focus of *Vogue* was on the traditions of high society, and fashion was only mentioned when giving advice on what was appropriate to wear to an occasion." ("History of *Vogue*, 2012). Now, with an audience of 12.5 million international readers and 31.1 million international monthly unique users, *Vogue* must be able to appeal to a vast majority of people and backgrounds. ("Conde Nast," 2013) Other fashion magazines, such as *Elle*, have the advantage of a much smaller audience and can therefore adjust their content to appeal to a more specific demographic. ("*Elle* media kit", 2013).

Since taking over in 1988, editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour has worked hard in protecting the magazine's status and reputation among fashion publications. To do this, she has focused on new and more accessible ideas of fashion that apply to a wider audience. This has allowed Wintour to keep circulation high while discovering new trends that anyone could conceivably afford. ("Fashion model directory", 2013). *Vogue* has become the champion of women's fashion publications because of its effective printed covers and dedication to its audience. By using consistency, it appeals to a wide demographic that spreads to all the corners of the world.

Importance

This research will interest designers of magazine covers because it will show them which techniques work and specifically, on what audiences. By figuring out how to catch a readers attention, the magazine industry may be able to maintain their significance and continue to be successful for decades to come. I am interested in this research because I see myself working in the magazine industry as a designer. I would like to work for a magazine with a similar audience to *Vogue* and hope to apply my research in my career. I like seeing how photography, typography, layout, and color all work together to enhance or detract from something.

Chapter Two
Literature Review

What has made *Vogue* the most popular and recognizable women's fashion magazine in the world? ("Top 10," 2013). Former magazine editors, Ita Buttrose and Paula Joye agree that a successful magazine cover contains colors that please the reader, an interesting photograph, and not too many cluttered cover lines. (Buttrose, 2011). Simplicity, interesting content, and inspiration from successful past covers can also lead to success. (Loveridge, 2013). Perhaps this explains why *Vogue* has continued to use a very simple and repetitive cover layout for 150 years. *Vogue* uses beautiful and relatively simple photography, typography, and color on all of their covers.

Some women's magazines, such as *Seventeen* use much more vibrant colors, explosive fonts and formatting, with their photography subjects in much bolder clothing. (Caroline, 2013). This is because they are marketing toward a younger audience. According to a *Vogue* media plan done by Carrie Kotalik, the median *Vogue* magazine reader's age is 32.9 and women make up 92% of the total audience. (Kotalik, 2011). Typography, photography, colors, and layout all contribute to the success of a magazine. This is the first thing a reader will see, so it must draw their attention and make them want to buy it.

While *Vogue*'s first full-color photographic cover was printed in July of 1932, it was not until mid-1939 that *Vogue* made the jump to using photographs on their covers as opposed to illustrations. ("*Vogue* prints," 2013). This was an innovative move for the time. For research purposes, I will focus on the time after *Vogue* incorporated photographs into their covers ("Cover browser," n.d.) *Vogue* has been around for 130 years as of December 2013, with no sign of slowing down. What began as an upscale weekly journal that aimed to appeal to only high society women and gentlemen, has become an exclusive women's fashion magazine that is published in over 23 countries and serves as a "cornerstone of fashion and culture for its millions of devoted readers." ("History of *Vogue*," 2012).

Photo

Vogue covers have transitioned from iconic fashion models on the covers, to now

being mainly actresses, singers, and other celebrities. (See figure 1). Speaking on the top 10 faces that are most frequently seen on *Vogue*'s cover, Nora Crotty says, "It's interesting to note that every woman on the list is a model (as opposed to the actresses/musicians who tend to grace the glossy nowadays)—but it's pretty alarming how little variety there is here." (Crotty, 2012).



Fig. 1: Then and now cover girls
 Kate Moss: November, 1997
 Scarlett Johansson: October, 2006
 "Cover browser," n.d.

Up until the early-2000s, *Vogue* featured mostly models on their covers. Among the most popular were Lauren Hutton, Kate Moss, Gisele Bündchen, and Karen Graham. ("Familiar Faces," 2012). Most of these names may not even be recognized by some of *Vogue*'s readers today. More recent cover girls have been actress, Emma Stone, and music icons, Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, and Adele.

Trends.

Because most women's fashion magazines made the transition from model covers to celebrity covers, it is difficult to say who started it, or why. Perhaps, because celebrities are more easily recognized by the general public they would increase the likelihood of a purchase.

Elle and *Marie Claire* magazines seem to consistently have their models photographed at three-quarter length, while *Vogue* tends to switch it up each month. Perhaps, the discontinuity of their cover photographs keep readers interested and engaged year-round. Some of their images are just of faces, others are of a group of people, and many of them are the popular three-quarter length photographs.

Typography & Color

It was not until about 1945 that *Vogue* settled on the iconic font that they use today for their title. Up until this time, the "*Vogue*" title was usually displayed in a



Fig. 2: Early Vogue fonts
“Cover browser,” n.d.

decorative font or stylized design that reflected the cover art. (See fig. 2). Because this font is so recognizable, it can be partially concealed by the cover’s photograph without masking the magazine’s identity.

Even after settling on a font, *Vogue* still varies the color of their masthead month-to-month (“Cover browser”, n.d.). Each *Vogue* cover typically features three different fonts; the masthead font, a bold, colored, sans-serif article title font, and a neutral, serif font that is used for sub-headings. While these styles definitely vary issue to issue, they are relatively consistent. As *Vogue* has developed and settled into its iconic style, their fonts and colors have grown and adapted as well.

Mastheads.

The color of the masthead and article titles is usually either drawn from a color that appears in the main photograph, or it is a color that contrasts the background. In a fascinating study conducted by British artist, Arthur Bruxton, the most prominent colors from every cover of U.S. *Vogue* (ever) were sampled and stacked into vertical columns. (See fig. 3). The color palettes for American and British *Vogue* feature a lot of white and bright colors, and are interestingly much lighter than those of Italian and French *Vogue*. (Labarre, 2012).

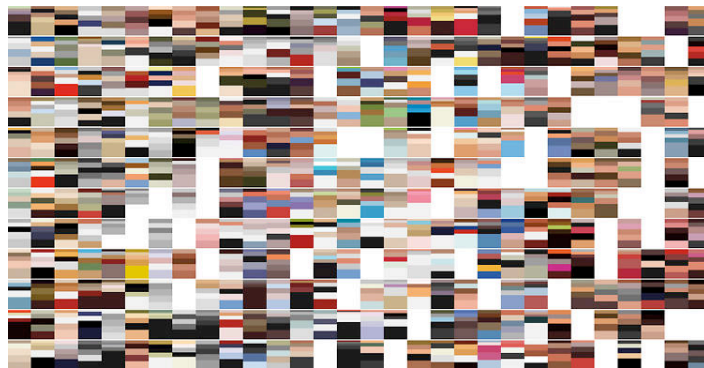


Fig. 3: U.S. Vogue color palette
Labarre, 2012

Predictable masthead font and placement with varied color seems to be what all women’s fashion magazines have settled on. Some magazines, like *Elle* and *Vogue* vary their masthead color quite greatly, while *Harper’s Bazaar* general keeps its color fairly

consistently black or white.

Layout

Similar to many women’s fashion magazines, *Vogue* uses a simple cover layout that reaches the audience by advertising the main articles that are inside, clearly displaying the magazine title, showing a beautifully photographed model, or models, and displaying the

publication date. (See fig. 4). Although this image displays the layout of *Cosmopolitan*, it can be applied to most women’s fashion magazines. There may be plenty of other women’s magazines, however none of them have achieved the lasting influence and success of *Vogue*. (“History of *Vogue*,” 2012).

Brazil.

The photographs on the cover of *Vogue* are usually centered on the cover and surrounded by article titles and other text elements. In June 2013’s *Vogue* Brazil’s issue, Gisele Bündchen is featured for the 121st time on a *Vogue* cover, but something



Fig. 5: June 2013, *Vogue* Brazil
Mavrody, 2013

was slightly different. (See fig. 5). On this cover, *Vogue* Brazil’s designer decided to take a risk and some think, “it looks like a very failed experiment... at best.” This designer decided the put all of the cover lines at a slight angle. Changing something that is so iconic is always dangerous, but, “when Gisele’s on your June cover (for the fifteen time), you can afford to take some risks.”

(Mavrody, 2013).

Though the layout and image placement may vary slightly issue to issue, the brand identity remains clear. Each cover has enough repeated elements that even with changed color schemes and photographs, it is easy to spot *Vogue* on a



Fig. 4: Fashion magazine layouts
Hackney, K. 2014 February

shelf. (See fig. 6). After almost 75 years with a repetitive look, *Vogue* has paved the way for other women's fashion magazines. "Over a century after the magazine's auspicious debut, *Vogue*'s covers continue to compel and influence." (Kazanjian, 2011). *Elle*, which was founded in the U.S. in 1985, and *Marie Claire*, founded in 1937, two of *Vogue*'s closest competitors, both use similar layouts for their covers. They may have modeled their look off *Vogue*.



Fig. 6: Some editions of *Vogue* display photographs of model's faces, whereas others feature three-quarter body images. With each style, the layout remains consistent. "Cover browser," n.d.

Vogue is successful because the editors and designers have perfected their covers. Through examining examples of photography, typography, color, and how they all work together to create a consistent and iconic cover, I have realized that *Vogue* really does do it best. *Vogue*'s choices are more successful because they are carefully planned to not only be consistent with the previous issues, but also to embrace current and future styles. Other women's fashion magazines create a very similar image, but with their iconic brand spread consistently worldwide, all others fall short. *Vogue* is a leader and a trend-setter for other magazines. This does not only mean they predict fashion trends in advance, but they have also created a magazine empire all carefully branded to look nearly identical.

Vogue is able to reach out to a very broad audience, and is therefore able to cover more ground. With U.S. *Vogue* appealing to 32.9-year-olds, they have also branched out with *teenVogue* and other varieties worldwide. Readers are attracted to the recognizable branding and know, without opening the magazine, that they can expect quality and consistency each month. *Vogue* has become the most recognizable and iconic women's fashion magazine in the world through years of carefully crafted covers and unique, yet consistent design.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The goal of this study was to explore the successful techniques used on *Vogue's* magazine covers and discover what they do differently from other women's fashion magazines. *Vogue* dominates the fashion magazine industry and is the most iconic and recognizable worldwide. The combination of photography, color, and typography used by *Vogue* designers has set them apart from other magazines. This study intended to find out what makes an ideal magazine cover by using *Vogue* as a successful example. The objective of this study was to:

Find out what is different about *Vogue's* printed magazine covers compared to other fashion magazines and how the techniques they use have helped them take the lead in the magazine industry.

Data Collection Plan

This research explores various factors that contribute to creating a magazine cover, such as: colors, typography, photography, and layout. Information was collected using two methods; a survey instrument (Appendix A), and a collection of data using an inconsistent observer method. For this, any data retrieved from a participant that provided inconsistent results, the data was removed from my observation. The survey was administered to a group of sixty women ages 20-40, because the average reader's age is 32.9 years. These women were approached in various areas of San Luis Obispo, CA and in San Francisco, CA and the survey was administered via iPad and printed data.

In the first survey, participants were asked questions and about their magazine reading habits. Included were questions about their magazine subscriptions, interest in fashion magazines, and significance of an interesting or eye-catching magazine cover.

Using the inconsistent observer method, I showed participants a group of similar magazine covers. Each cover varied slightly from the previous and these variations were in isolated areas, including; typography, color, layout, and photography. In order to determine which elements were preferred by the reader, I asked them to pick a favorite from random pairs of the covers until each cover was shown.

Data Analysis Plan

The results from these two collection methods were quantified and noted, and all inconsistent observers were thrown out in order to maintain legitimacy and consistency. The names of the participants remain anonymous but all relevant demographic information will be included in results. This data was used to determine what the magazine cover preferences are for 20-40 year old women and to see how this information relates to the techniques used by *Vogue*, the fashion industries most successful magazine. The results were presented in graphs next to each of the varied magazine cover designs.

Chapter Four

Results

General Information

Sixty women were surveyed between the ages of 20 and 40 in order to better understand the preferences of *Vogue*'s main audience. 38 of the women surveyed were between 20- and 24-years old; five were between 25- and 29-years old; eight were between 30- and 34-years old; and nine were between 35- and 39-years old.

93.3% of the women surveyed preferred reading printed magazines to digital magazines, the other 6.7% had no preference, and none of them reported digital as their preferred reading method. About half (48.3%) of the women have subscriptions to one or more magazines, while the other 51.7% women do not currently subscribe to any magazines. 81.6% of the sixty women were from somewhere in the state of California, while the other 18.4% reside in another area of the United States.

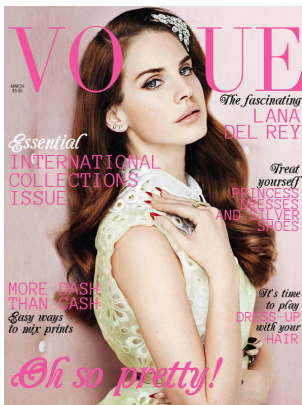
Vogue

Of the women surveyed, only 41.7% of them have purchased a printed edition of *Vogue* in the last six months to a year. 65% of the women reported that fashion is a genre of magazine that they are most likely to purchase.

Cover preferences.

The primary reason for this research was to discover trends within magazine cover preferences for women aged 20-40. These covers include a traditionally "*Vogue*-looking" cover and four separate versions, each varying slightly from the original: variation of color, variation of fonts, variation of layout, and variation of photo. To conduct research, each woman was shown two variations of the magazine cover side-by-side and asked to choose their favorite of the two. This was done repeatedly until all 10 combinations of covers had been compared. Results from this research can be seen on page 17.

For some of the comparisons, the preferences were unanimous amongst the women I surveyed, with others, they seemed to be split down the middle. Fairly consistently, the photo variation was not preferred; while the original cover was always the preference in each comparison.



font variation
figure 7



photo variation
figure 8



layout variation
figure 9

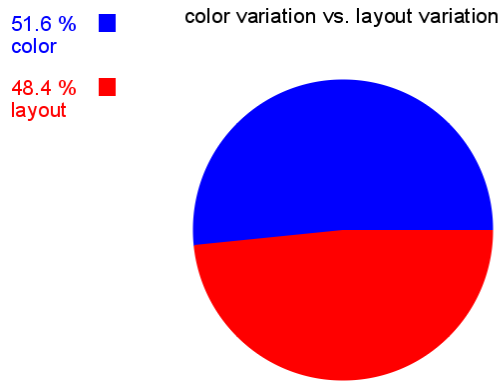


color variation
figure 10



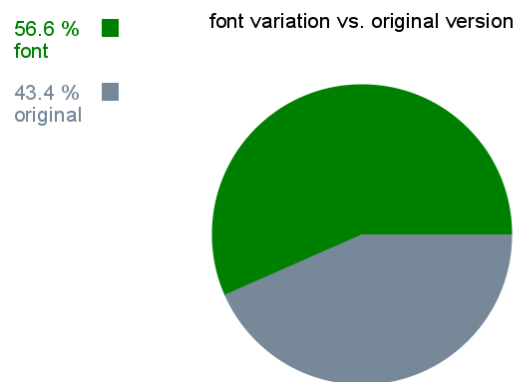
original version
figure 11

figure 12



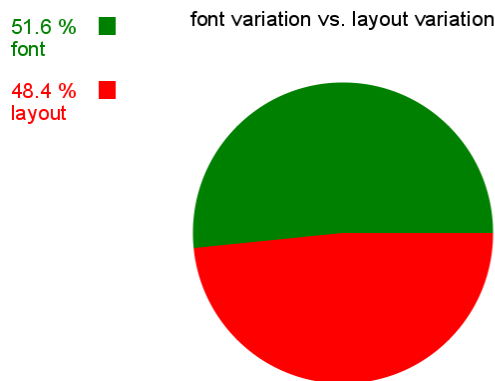
12. In the color vs layout variation comparison there is not a huge split seen, survey participants did not lean strongly either way. Based on results from other comparisons, participants did not seem to prefer either of these variations.

figure 13



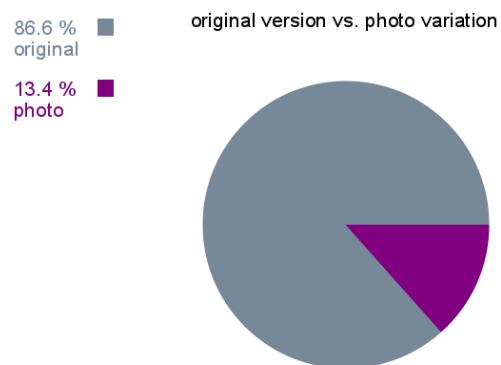
13. In the font variation vs original variation comparison there is a slight preference to the changed fonts. This surprised me because the original version was the majority in every other comparison.

figure 14



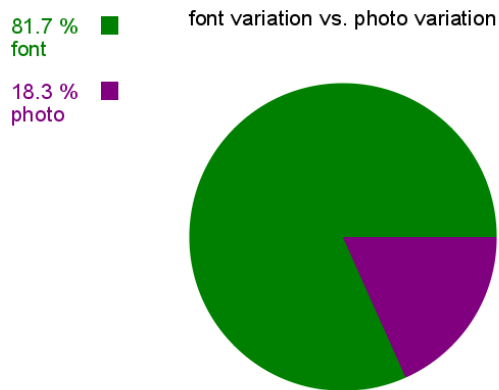
14. When the font and layout variations were compared, neither took a strong lead. One survey participant commented that the font variation was difficult to catch without a close look. I think that readers are overall more comfortable with a traditional magazine layout.

figure 15



15. The original version was a clear lead in this comparison. The photo variation featured much more white space and also shows the model's entire body instead of just her upper half which seems to please most readers.

figure 16



16. Again, participants showed their dislike for the photo variation when it was compared to the font variation. This untraditional photo style seemed to be the participants' least favorite variation.

17. To my surprise, participants liked the color variation much more than I had expected. Here, the split between font and color variations was exactly 50/50. It appears that there was no preference.

figure 17

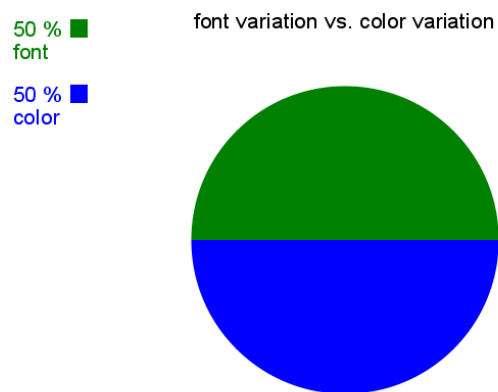
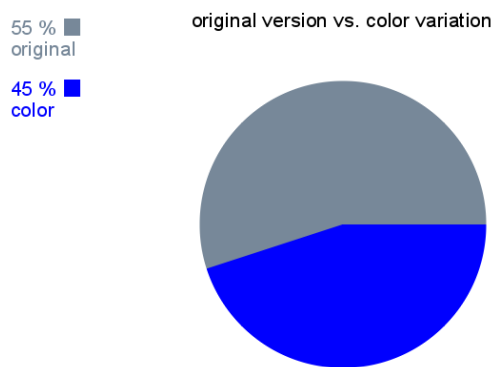


figure 18



18. The original version comes out on top when compared to the color variation. Though the layout and photo remained the same, participants preferred the colors scheme that was more consistent with the main image.

19. An obvious favorite here, the original version was favored greatly over the layout variation. One participant stated that the layout variation looked unbalanced and like, "something is missing."

figure 19

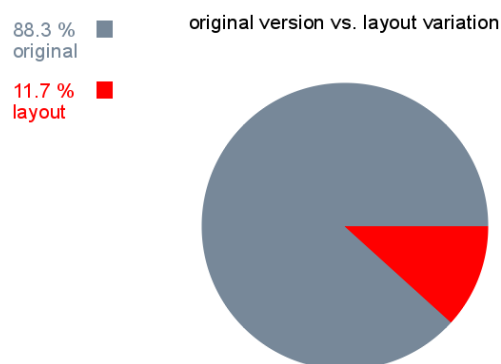
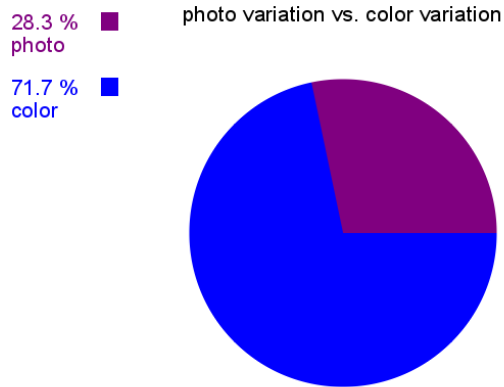
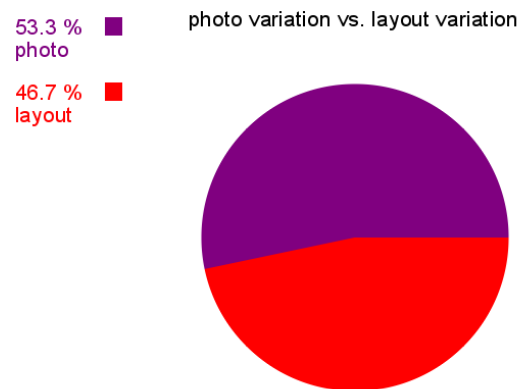


figure 20



20. Again, the photo variation is clearly not favored; this time, compared to the color variation. According to participants, the photo on the photo variation cover seemed to represent an image you would see inside a magazine, and not on the cover.

figure 21



21. When compared to the layout variation, however, participants preferred the photo variation. Perhaps this leads back to the comment about the unbalanced feeling of the change in layout.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

Through my research I was able to find out what is different about *Vogue's* printed magazine covers compared to other women's fashion magazines and how the techniques they use have helped them take the lead in the industry.

From the information collected through this survey, I can conclude that the age-range of women that are most likely to purchase and read *Vogue* magazine are partial to the qualities that are commonly associated with *Vogue's* printed magazine covers. When the original cover was compared to a variation, it was always chosen by the majority of the women surveyed. One survey participant said, "It is pretty obvious what you are doing here, I can tell which cover you want me to choose because it is clearly the most pleasing design." While, my intention was to prove that the *original* cover was the fan-favorite, this survey participant was actually referring to the color variation, which I thought was quite amusing.

While their style is not always completely unique from other women's fashion magazines, it is *Vogue's* consistency and recognizability that has helped them remain the top women's fashion magazine worldwide.

Deviations

There are some deviations from this conclusion, however, fewer than half (41.6%) of the 60 women surveyed said that they read *Vogue*. Ideally, I would have liked all participants to have been *Vogue*-readers. Also, for the comparison between the original cover and the color variation, the results differed by only six votes, with the original in the lead. The original cover follows *Vogue's* model of making font color choices that complement the colors used in the main image.

Further Research

To an extent, my research supports my hypothesis that *Vogue's* audience would prefer the most traditional-looking cover, however, I would like to see further data collected. I believe this research could benefit from expanding the pool of women and surveying a sample of 200 in order to get a fair idea for preferred qualities on *Vogue* magazine covers.

Perhaps, more cover variations could be created in order to pinpoint exactly what it is that the women like or dislike about *Vogue*'s traditional look. Survey participants could also be asked to answer further questions about each cover; i.e. What do you like about this cover?, What do you dislike about this cover?, Does this cover look "*Vogue*" to you?, etc. I also think that the magazine design industry would benefit from expanding this research to other magazine audiences, such as men and children, or other genres of women's magazines.

Importance

Now, more than ever, the printed magazine must catch the readers' attention and get them to make a purchase. The printed magazine industry is on the decline, and one of the main things that sets it apart from digital and online versions is the cover. However, my survey uncovered that a majority (93.3%) of magazine readers prefer printed to digital magazines. One participant said, "There is something about a tangible magazine that doesn't exist in the digital world...like the ability to tear out a picture or a recipe that you liked." In stores, magazine covers are often what draws us to buy or read them. Whether it is the main image, cover titles, or another element, getting the reader to pick it up is the first step. The magazine design industry could use this research to discover what it is *exactly* that helps make the sale.

Based on my research, I was able to develop a design guide for Women's Fashion magazine covers (Appendix B). I intended for this guide to be useful to designers, especially new designers, in the women's fashion magazine industry. In this guide, I expanded upon the four elements that I discovered to be the most important when it comes to designing a magazine cover: photo, color, layout, and typography. Each of these elements represent an important part of a cover and they all work together to create something meaningful and eye-catching.

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Appendix A
Survey Questions

Basic Survey Questions

What age range do you belong to?:

- under 20 -20-24 -25-29 -30-34
- 35-39 -40-44 -45+

Where are you from?:

- Northern California -Central Coast, CA
- Southern California -other _____

When was the last time you bought a magazine?:

- within the 2 weeks -within the last month
- within the last 3 months -within the last 6 months
- within the last year -over a year ago
- never

Was this magazine printed or digital?

- print -digital -other _____

Do you prefer print or digital?

- print -digital
- no preference -other _____

Are you subscribed to any magazines? If so, how many?

- yes -no

What genre of magazine are you most likely to buy?

- art/photography -electronics/computers -fashion -teen
- cooking/home goods -music -health/fitness -sports
- travel -other _____

Do you read *Vogue*?

- yes -no

Have you purchased a printed issue of *Vogue*? (If yes, when?)

- yes, within the last six months -yes, within the last year
- no, but I read it online -no, I do not read *Vogue*

Magazine Cover Survey Questions

Which do you prefer? -compare 2 covers

- Variations:** -Photo -Color -Type -Layout

Appendix B
Women's Fashion Magazine Design Guide



- A masthead
- B main image
- C model credit

- D selling line
- E cover line(s)
- F main cover line

A MASTHEAD:

- » mastheads should be consistent on each edition in order to establish a branded identity for the magazine.
- » this element should be large and centered near the top of the cover
- » a masthead should be a recognizable element that remains obvious even if covered by part of the main image
- » color of the masthead should be cohesive with the main image

B main image

- » should feature a very recognizable and fashionable man or woman dressed in the latest styles
- » this should be a photograph of just the model's face, or around three-quarters of their body
- » it is very important that the background of the main image be subtle or plain so that it does not distract from any text elements on the cover
- » any photographic manipulation techniques that alter body shape and color should be kept to a minimum
- » a common technique that is seen on many magazine covers is the intentional action of leaving the left third of the photo somewhat empty. This is to increase legibility, as we read from left to right

C model credit

- » some readers may not recognize the model, and for others, the model may be a selling point;

therefore, it is critical that the model is credited on the cover and that some kind of interesting story ties in to their appearance on the cover

D selling line

- » often the reason why someone might pick up a magazine to begin with is the selling line; therefore, it should captivate and interest the reader from the very beginning.
- » font choices should be minimal, at a maximum of three separate font families per cover
- » it is typical to use a **SANS SERIF**, serif, and an alternated (*italic* or **bold**) version of one of these two
- » the masthead is an unrelated element that usually appears in a different fontface

E cover line(s)

- » similar to the selling line, cover lines give the reader more information about the magazine's contents
- » the style of the cover line should be consistent with the rest of the magazine
- » the color of selling and cover lines should either be drawn from the main image or work well with the color scheme of the main image

F main cover line

- » the main cover line is the largest line on the magazine cover
- » similar to the selling line, the main objective of this is to draw readers in